

TALL SITS WITH A BALLOON SQUEEZE

This activity is a progression of a Tall Sit. Participants will squeeze a balloon, pulling it in against their chest, to engage back muscles essential to posture.

Benefits »

- ⦿ Improves posture and core stability.
- ⦿ Strengthens back extensors and scapular retractors.
- ⦿ Uses colorful balloons or balls as resistance tools.

Set It Up »

You will need one 12-inch (30-centimeter) balloon per person and a few extras, just in case. Balloons are fun and inexpensive tools to use in class. Balloons really brighten up a classroom! They generally cost about a dime each and you can change colors with the seasons and holidays. For best results blow up the balloons a day or two before class. The first day you blow up the balloons, they tend to be tight and slippery—they're better the next day and after. If you have a bigger budget, consider buying Slo Mo balls on Web sites or in equipment magazines. They stay blown up much longer, meaning less work for you. Some variations require a balance disc or an extra balloon.

How to Do It »

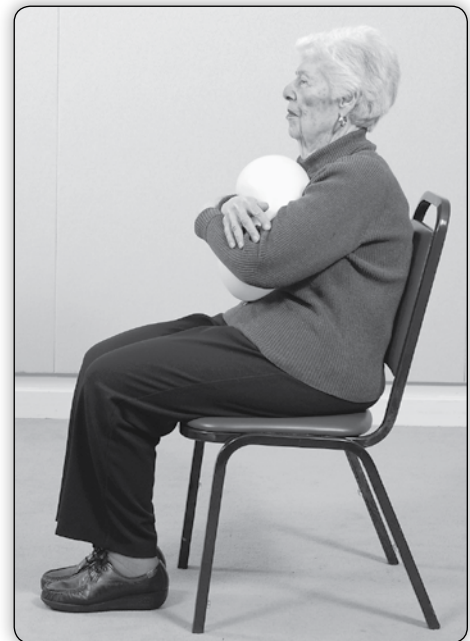
The Start

- ⦿ If possible participants sit with their back away from the chair. The hips can touch the chair, but their back should not. They are sitting tall, with shoulders over hips, head retracted, and chin level. Feet are flat on the floor, hip-width apart.
- ⦿ They place a balloon on their chest and cross their forearms over the balloon like the Genie Arms position.

The Moves

Use the following cues.

- ⦿ Inhale and pull up into a tall sitting position (ribs lifted and torso long, lengthened by the spine).
- ⦿ Exhale for 3 seconds and squeeze the balloon firmly, pulling it in toward the chest. The pull is done with the arms, back, and shoulder blades.
- ⦿ Cue to draw their shoulder blades back, down, and together.
- ⦿ Hold each squeeze for 3 to 5 seconds, while exhaling, and then relax.
- ⦿ Inhale, sit tall, and do it again.
- ⦿ Repeat four times and build to eight times, as tolerated.
- ⦿ Stretch the midback gently and do a few shoulder circles when done.



Take It Further »

- ⊙ Increase hold times while continuing to breathe fully.
- ⊙ Add leaning during the exhales; but always return to the Tall Sit before the repetition is finished.
 - Lean a little to the left. Return to the center and sit tall.
 - Lean a little to the right. Return to the center and sit tall.
 - Lean a little forward and backward. Return to the center and sit tall.
 - Make small circles or figure eights with the torso. Return to center and sit tall.

Give It More Balance »

- ⊙ Discuss what participants felt and learned. Could they feel the muscles between their shoulder blades come together? Did exhaling while they squeezed help? Do they notice that when their back is held strong and stable the entire spine works as a single unit (there's no flexing or bending up and down the spine)? Nice job! Here are some more balance variations:
- ⊙ Sit at the front of the chair.
- ⊙ Use an offset or tandem foot position.
- ⊙ Use an offset or tandem foot position with the heels lifted off the floor.
- ⊙ Place one foot or both feet on another balloon on the floor.
- ⊙ Stand to do this exercise.
- ⊙ Sit on a balance disc, in a chair with arms.
- ⊙ Squeeze the balloon while walking.

Keep It Safe »

Pressing a balloon against your chest compresses the ribs. Cue squeezes by saying, "Gently, but firmly," instead of "tightly" or "hard." Remind them that nothing should hurt and that they should be comfortable throughout the activity.

Live It »

Participants should enjoy this progression to Tall Sits. It will make them work a little harder and focus on drawing the shoulder blades back and down.